

TOWARDS REDUCING HEALTH INEQUITIES:

A HEALTH SYSTEM APPROACH TO CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION

The Immigrant Population Working Group includes representatives from a diverse range of organizations including:

- Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies
- Centre for Healthy Aging, Providence
- Provincial Health Services Authority
 - » Provincial Language Services
- REACH Community Health Centre
- University of British Columbia
 - » Faculty of Medicine
 - » School of Population Health and Public Health
- Vancouver Coastal Health
 - » Community Engagement
 - » Cross Cultural Mental Health Program
 - » Population Health

¹ Health system approaches to promoting health equity: A discussion paper (Mador, 2010)



Immigrant Population Working Group Recommendations

The Working Group used “A Framework for Conceptualizing Equity in Health Care”¹ to organize recommendations. This framework is based on three dimensions for understanding equity in the delivery of health services:

- Availability,
- Accessibility,
- Acceptability.

Based on five meetings of the Immigrant Population Working Group and a Community Engagement meeting with various settlement and immigrant serving agencies, a number of Barriers and Opportunities for Action were identified. The following is a summary of the Working Group’s findings.

1. Availability of Services

Barrier

Immigrants can experience difficulties finding a family physician and accessing health care in their own language.

It can be challenging for some immigrant sub-groups (e.g. sponsored seniors) to obtain extended medical care.

Opportunities for Action

- Increase capacity within the interpreting community to provide services to GPs.
- Provide the opportunity for foreign trained health care professionals to act as cultural health brokers.
- Improve the availability of extended health care services.

2. Accessibility of Services

Barrier

Immigrants have challenges in navigating the complexity of the Canadian health care system.

Opportunities for Action

- Increase support for cultural health brokers.
- Hire foreign trained health care professionals as cultural health brokers.

2. Accessibility of Services (cont...)

Barrier	Opportunities for Action
<p>A lack of culturally responsive and (geographically) accessible health services means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants may travel long distances. • Services may not be provided at suitable times for immigrants. • Health care providers may not recognize mental health issues of immigrants 	<p>Partner with localized immigrant community organizations to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health promotion programs, • Medical outreach services, • Mental health services.
<p>Discontinuity between settlement services and health services means that settlement workers often have limited knowledge about available health services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build health promotion capacity among settlement workers & immigrant serving agencies. • Improve information support between health literacy coordinators and settlement agencies. • Improve collaboration between community agencies and settlement workers.
<p>Information is provided in a way that does not enhance health literacy, such as using only English and using jargon or advanced vocabulary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve health literacy by utilizing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » cultural health brokers and existing community programs, » media, such as radio and TV, and » ESL classes. • Promote awareness of interpreting services for health care providers. • Develop partnerships between immigrant serving agencies and the BC Health Literacy Strategy.
<p>Waiting periods can delay access for new immigrants to access the publicly funded health care system.</p>	<p>Examine waiting period policies in BC, to ensure they meet the Accessibility Principle of the Canada Health Act.</p>
<p>The Social Determinants of Health including poverty, transportation and housing affect health status of immigrants.</p>	<p>Provide support within the health sector to address the social determinants of health.</p>

3. Acceptability of Services/Patient Centered Care

Barrier	Opportunities for Action
<p>Limited cultural competency means that health care is not always culturally responsive.</p> <p>Limited cultural safety means that immigrants don't always feel their cultural identity has been respected.</p>	<p>Improve culturally competency and cultural safety by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing education to health care providers, including how to work with cultural brokers and interpreters, as well as on the use of alternate therapies, and • utilizing the knowledge and expertise of immigrant serving agencies to help train health care providers and/or improve health programs and services.